




J. TYLER McCAULEY
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

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October 27, 2005

TO: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: J. Tyler McCauley 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **THE SYCAMORES FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW**

We have completed a contract compliance review of The Sycamores Foster Family Agency (The Sycamores or Agency), a Foster Family Agency service provider. The review was conducted by the Auditor-Controller's Countywide Contract Monitoring Division.

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) contracts with The Sycamores, a private, non-profit, community-based organization to recruit, train, and certify foster care parents for the supervision of children placed in foster care by DCFS. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

The Sycamores is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. During our review, The Sycamores oversaw a total of 25 certified foster homes in which 36 DCFS children were placed. The Sycamores is located in the Fifth District.

DCFS pays The Sycamores a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Funding and Rate Bureau. Based on the child's age, The Sycamores receives between \$1,589 and \$1,865 per month, per child. Out of these amounts, The Sycamores pays the foster parents

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

between \$650 and \$800 per month, per child. For Fiscal Year 2004-05, DCFS paid The Sycamores approximately \$560,000.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether the Agency was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and County contract. We also evaluated The Sycamores' ability to achieve planned staffing levels. Our monitoring visit included verifying whether the Agency received the appropriate reimbursement rate for each child and whether the certified foster parents received their portion of the reimbursement rate in a timely manner. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files, and interviewed The Sycamores' staff, the children and the foster parents. We also visited a sample of certified foster homes.

Results of Review

Overall, The Sycamores provided the services outlined in its County contract. The foster parents stated that the services they received from the Agency meet their expectations, and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. The Sycamores maintained documentation to support the services billed to DCFS and employs qualified staff to perform those services.

The Sycamores did not always ensure that the DCFS social workers participated in the development of the children's Needs and Services Plans or approved the Plans prior to their implementation.

The details of our review, along with recommendations for corrective action, are attached.

Review of Report

On September 14, 2005 we discussed our report with The Sycamores who agreed with the findings. In their attached response, The Sycamores management reported their actions to implement the recommendation contained in this report. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank The Sycamores for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions, or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (626) 293-1102.

JTM:MMO:DC

Attachment

- c: David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer
- David Sanders, Ph.D., Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Bill Martone, Executive Director, The Sycamores
- Litsa Mitchell, Director, The Sycamores Foster Family Agency
- Colleen Anderson, Community Care Licensing
- Public Information Office
- Audit Committee

**COUNTYWIDE CONTRACT MONITORING DIVISION
FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
FISCAL YEAR 2005-2006
THE SYCAMORES FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY**

PROGRAM SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether The Sycamores Foster Family Agency (The Sycamores or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 Regulations.

Verification

We visited three of the 25 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that The Sycamores billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for in February and March 2005 and interviewed three foster parents and two children. We also reviewed their case files and the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

Overall, The Sycamores provided the services required by its County contract and Title 22 regulations. The foster parents stated that the services they received from the Agency met their expectations and the children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents. The foster parents were certified and were given appropriate training by The Sycamores as required by the County contract. In addition, the Agency's foster homes were clean and well maintained.

Although The Sycamores provided most of the services required by the County contract, the Agency did not always ensure that the DCFS social workers participated in the development of the children's Needs and Services Plans or approved the Plans prior to implementing them. Three (50%) of six children's Needs and Services Plans were not signed by the child's DCFS social worker prior to implementing the plan as required by the County contract.

Recommendation

1. **The Sycamores management ensure that written approvals are obtained from the DCFS social workers prior to implementing the Needs and Services Plans.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

To determine whether the program participants actually received the services for which The Sycamores billed DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed two of six children placed in three certified foster homes and three foster parents to confirm the services The Sycamores billed to DCFS.

Results

The program participants interviewed stated that the services they received from The Sycamores met their expectations and their assigned social workers were supportive and visited them regularly.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS

Objective

Determine whether The Sycamores' social workers' caseloads did not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker did not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed The Sycamores' director and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for February and March 2005.

Results

The Sycamores' three social workers maintained an average of 11 cases. In addition, the director supervised an average of three social workers.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS**Objective**

Determine whether The Sycamores' staff possessed the education and work experience qualifications required by their County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether The Sycamores conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

We interviewed The Sycamores' director and acting supervising social worker. In addition, we reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

The Sycamores' director and social workers possess the required education and work experience required by the County contract and Title 22 regulations. In addition, The Sycamores appropriately completed hiring clearances and provided ongoing training to staff assigned to the County contract.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.



September 22, 2005

TO: Supervisor Gloria Molina, Chair
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Litsa Mitchell, Program Director
The Sycamores Foster Family Agency

SUBJECT: **RESPONSE TO OUR CONTRACT COMPLIANCE REVIEW**

We would like to thank the Auditor-Controller's office for a comprehensive and collaborative review of our Foster Family Agency's services. The Auditor-Controller staff involved, Ms. Alice Marutani and Mr. Brian Henricks, demonstrated an understanding of the work we do and their guidance and perspective was appreciated.

Regarding the one finding wherein we did not have the County Children's Social Worker (CSW) signature on the Needs and Services Plan for three children, in each of these cases we had faxed the Plan to the CSW requesting their review and signature, but had not received a response from the CSW. To address this issue, the following protocol has been implemented:

The Sycamores FFA Social Worker will fax the Plan to the CSW for review and signature and will place a call to the CSW alerting the CSW that the fax is being sent. If the CSW does not respond to the fax within three days, FFA staff will contact the CSW's Supervisor for assistance and will document these attempts.

We appreciate the Auditor-Controller's recognition of our program and the important contribution made by our dedicated staff and foster parents.

LM:lm

c: William Martone, CEO and President, The Sycamores
Brian Henricks, Auditor-Controller's office

The Sycamores Foster Family Agency
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